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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of "Discretion vs. Valor," a simulation game designed to give North American players a chance to: (1) identify with "believers" (Christians) in the Soviet Union in order to form new images of these persons; (2) gain empathy for Christians by understanding the dilemmas they face as they exercise their faith; and (3) become active participants in decision-making in a family group context. The game prototype was tested, evaluated, and revised during 10 field tests in 1987. During 1988 celebrations of the millennial year of Russian Orthodoxy, 72 North American Christians played the revised game in 15 "family" groups, returning self-report evaluations which included 78 claims of "identification" with at least one of the game's characters. Reports of the game's greater than average influence upon their cognitive learning came from 76% of the players, while 60% of all players reported that the game experience produced changes in their attitudes. Comparison of pre- and post-game measures of behavioral intention for six common religious practices showed 95% of players with altered "commitment levels" after play. Future tests of identification theory and role empathy are suggested by this study. Data are presented in three tables, and instruments for pre-game and post-game measurement of attitude change and for participant evaluation of the simulation are included. (3 references) (Author/GL)

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Title:

Discretion vs. Valor: The Development and Evaluation of a Simulation Game about Being a Believer in the Soviet Union

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DISCRETION VS. VALOR:
The Development and Evaluation of a Simulation Game about Being a Believer in the Soviet Union

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Abstract

Lenin's 1918 decree on "Separation of Church and State", updated in 1975, reaffirms atheism as the only official stance for Christians in the USSR. This is in spite of the 1000-1500 year histories of some of the established churches, and the registration as believers (Christians) of at least a fourth of its people. DISCRETION VS. VALOR gives players a chance to: identify with "believers" in the USSR in order to get new images of these persons; gain sympathethic understanding (empathy) for Christians in the dilemmas posed as they exercise their faith; be active participants in decision-making in a family group context. The 24 dilemmas requiring choices from players come from research in the USSR, from stories of recent emigres and frequent USSR travelers, and from American and British institutes which monitor the many legal and extra-legal discriminatory practices faced by believers. The game prototype was tested, evaluated and revised during ten field tests in 1987. During 1988 celebrations of the millennial year of Russian Orthodoxy, 72 North American Christians played the revised game in fifteen "family" groups, returning self-report evaluations which included 78 claims of "identification" with at least one of the game's characters. Reports of the game's greater-than-average influence upon their cognitive learning ("5" or above on a 7-point scale) came from 76% of the players, while 60% of all players reported that the game experience produced changes in their attitudinal affect. However, comparison of pre-and post-game measures of behavioral intention for six common religious practices showed 95% of players with altered "commitment levels" after play. Future tests of "identification theory" and "role empathy" are suggested by this study.

Introduction

In 1990, it is difficult for Americans to remember the "bad old days of the cold war" with the rapid changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe during the past year. Mass demonstrations, calls for independence within the Soviet Union itself, free exercise of election rights and the promise of multiple party elections from Soviet President Gorbachev testify to **glasnost** and **perestroika** in the political arena. There are even some signs of increased religious openness in this offically atheistic nation although church leaders are cautious in their pronouncements. London's Keston College and the American-based Institute for Religion and Democracy, watchdogs on all matters of religious freedom, report release of large numbers of previously held "prisoners of conscience". The return to the parishes of several hundred "non-working" Russian Orthodox churches, previously designated museums or public buildings, seems to demonstrate acknowledgment by the Councils on Religious Affairs that insistence on atheism as the only official belief has not succeeded in stamping out the latent faith of Soviet "believers" (the name used for all Christian groups in the USSR). January 8 media coverage of thousands of Russian Orthodox parish members openly celebrating Christmas, many for the first time since Lenin's 1918 decrees, gave credibility to a possible new era in church-state relations. Even the long fight by Ukranian Catholics for recognition as a separate denomination is given some hope for dialogue by Gorbachev (February 1, New York Times). Actual legal enactments are still lacking, so it remains to be seen if both legal and extra-legal long-standing societal discrimination will continue to be exerted against believers. Still, American Christians may see some hopeful signs for Soviet brethren.

This was not the case in 1986 when the present study was begun. Americans still had very limited information, and hence a curtailed view of persons and conditions in countries behind the "Iron Curtain". When the Fellowship on Reconciliation undertook to promote more understanding about ordinary Russian people, they entitled their photo series, "Forbidden Faces." Media coverage about persons in the Soviet Union, rather than helping Americans to form sympathetic or even accurate images, added to their misconceptions, when it pictured Russians as unfriendly enemies. The pre-summit characterization of the Soviet "evil empire" by the American President did little to alleviate natural antipathy caused by lack of information or even intentional build-up of distrust by the media.

Misconceptions were even stronger for American church members with the specter of atheism added to the overall negative attitudes. Soviet publications usually portrayed religious communities as being enfeebled and dominated by

"old, superstitious babushki", suggesting the death of the church when these Russian grandmothers were gone. The more frequent criticism was that Russian Christians had so compromised the faith that it's authenticity was gone. Both American and Canadian press releases were critical of Soviet church representatives at Vancouver's 1983 World Council of Churches Assembly for neglecting to use the occasion to chastise their government's position on religion and human rights.

The former discrimination faced by Soviet Jewry and refusniks was harshest of all, but this subject received much more media attention and public outrage on this continent. By contrast, North American Christians, even those who might have been disposed to be sympathetic to their USSR counterparts, had little information about those persons whom the Soviet state branded as believers. Vague knowledge about Lenin's post-revolution decrees about atheism as the only officially endorsed position produced more prejudice than sympathetic understanding.

DISCRETION VS. VALOR was developed to address this need by supplementing other publications produced by the National Council of Churches' Friendship Press for its 1988 study of Peoples and Churches of the Soviet Union. In this year of the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church, a stated goal called for a change in attitudes:

> ... to bring about a recognition of our prejudices, fears and distorted images, so that we (North American Christians) may be open to fresh insights about people and churches in the USSR.

A goal of "being open to fresh insights" suggested that some learning objectives for the 1988 Soviet study would involve attitudinal change. Designers and users of simulation games claim that this more experiential learning method makes gaming particularly effective in producing changes in attitudes. Four advantages claimed for simulation gaming include: potential for attitudinal change; the realism that comes from group interaction in decision-making; possible "identification" with persons whose roles are played (Williams, 1986) and role empathy (Livingston et. al., The Hopkins Games Program, 1973) or sympthetic understanding about those who are portrayed.

The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate a simulation game involving participants' identification with and sympathetic understanding of those persons who are called "believers" (Christians) in the Soviet Union. Three learning objectives would guide the formative evaluation process; criterion-referenced summative evaluation would be conducted after revisions.

Methods of development and formative evaluation

In 1986, the author composed seven character roles and 28 decisions, called "commitment level" in the game, which typified Soviet believers' actions. In spring of 1987, a research grant provided opportunities to travel for several weeks to the USSR to interview believers in a variety of settings. Following these interviews, six characters were retained, roles were revised, playing rules were developed, and sets of cards were constructed to portray four levels of COMMITMENT and RISK that each of the Soviet characters might experience under present discriminatory regulations, both legal and extra-legal.

The research trip to the Soviet Union also afforded opportunities to secure visuals to supplement the game. A 42-slide set, Picture Yourself, A Soviet Believer, accompanies the game and acquaints the players with each other's decision choices.

Content review of game rules, cards, and roles by subject matter experts was done by five frequent Soviet travelers, defined as those whose work within agencies in the USA caused them to travel repeatedly to the USSR and to have extensive contacts with Soviet Christians. Included were Pittsburgh's Cultural Affairs Chairman of Peace Links, the head of the Chicago-based Institute for the Study of Marxism and Christianity, and the lone U.S. Protestant representative from the National Council of Churches to the USSR, in residence there from 1983-1986. The initial design review was done by Bailey and Tarasar (1987), the authors of the Friendship Press guidebook for this ecumenical study.

Throughout June and July of 1987, Field Trials of the game were conducted with populations of prospective teachers who were preparing to provide leadership for the 1988 millennial study. Two university classes, one in Games and Simulations and another in Intercultural Communication, participated in Field Trails of the game and provided suggestions for eight revisions of the game. A total of eleven Field Trails were conducted, involving 228 players on campuses in four eastern states. (Figure 1: Flowchart of Phase 2 & 3 Evaluation Processes)

Use of several types of assessment forms provided bases for evaluation of these instruments during the field tests. Two specialists, one in evaluation and one in test design, provided expert review of the instruments judged to have the greatest usefulness in formative evaluation. (See current forms in Appendix.)

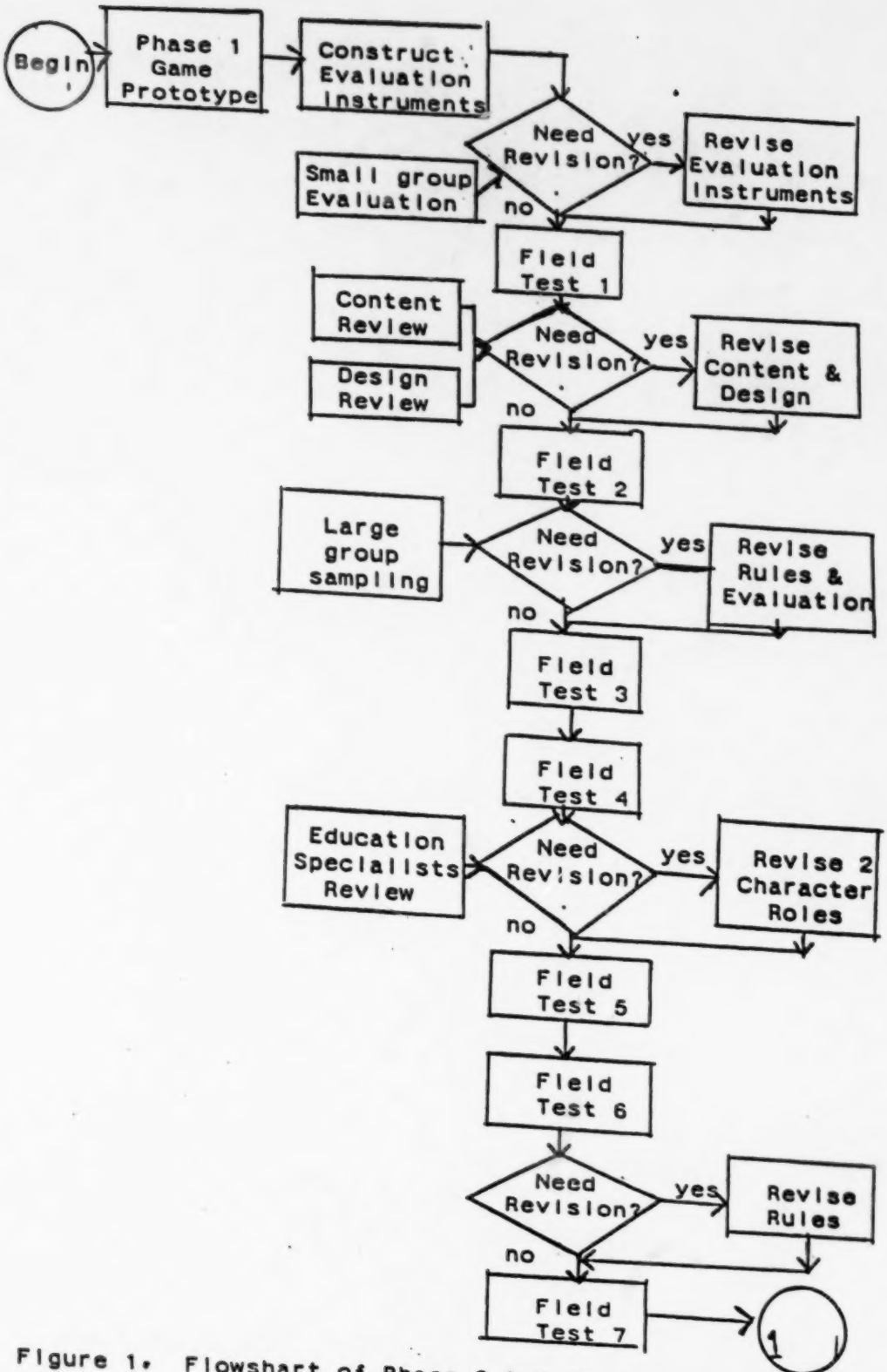
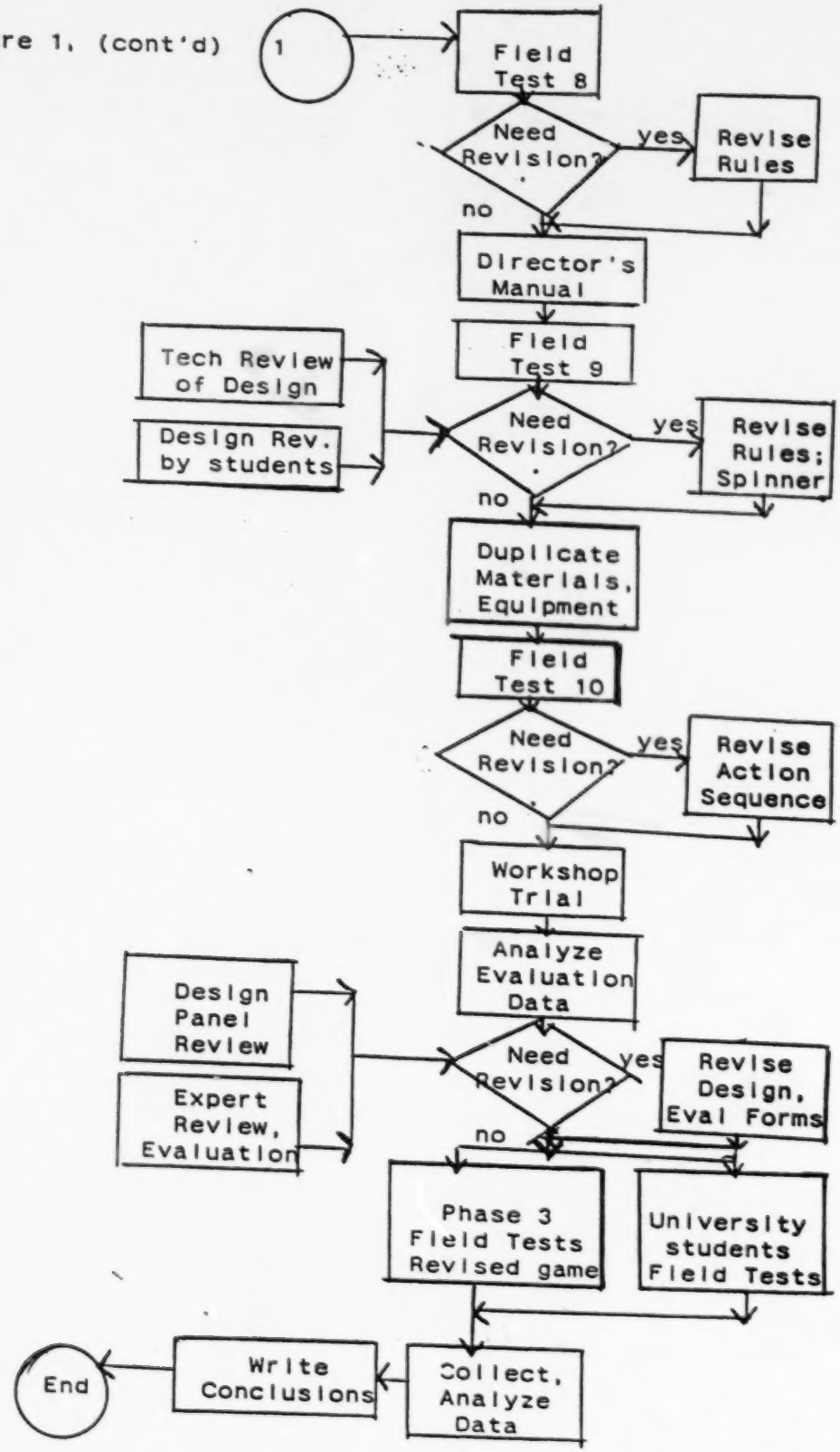


Figure 1. Flowshart of Phase 2 & 3 Evaluation Processes

Figure 1. (cont'd)



Summative evaluation of simulation game's objectives

By 1988, the year of the Russian Orthodox Church's millennium and the year of the ecumenical study by North American Christians, the game was ready for use in eight additional Field Tests. In five settings the 75 players were members of Christian denominations and data from the revised evaluation instruments were analyzed in summative evaluation about the game's effectiveness in meeting its criterion-referenced objectives.

The current Decision Predictor (Appendix A) is designed to demonstrate changes in sympathetic understanding for Soviet Christians who are faced with daily dilemmas as they practice their faith. The participant is asked to respond **as-if** s/he were seeking to exercise some religious practice in the Sovet Union. Attitude change is measured on an agreement scale of [+3 to -3], a shift in the direction or strength of a self-report of one's own predicted behavior. Comparisons of responses on this Decision Predictor, both before and after play, are also useful in producing discussion during the game debriefing time.

The Revised Evaluation Form (Appendix B) elicits information to measure the game's criterion-referenced objectives. It also serves as a means of continued evaluation and revision of the game. Some unexpected patterns in results from earlier evaluations indicated that participants might be experiencing role empathy or identification with the Soviet citizens whom they play in the simulation. "Identification" is measured by a self report, the ability of a person to see similarities between himself and another. "Role empathy" is defined as the process of "feeling into" another person with "sympathetic (affective domain) understanding (cognitive elements).

Table 1 shows the data which measure results for Objective 1 from the game: "to cause identification with Soviet believers" by North American Christian players. Responses from 75 players yielded 78 reports of identification with one or more characters in the game. All but ten players reported identification with at least one character. Table 1 also shows a response pattern in these reports of identification: the greatest percentage of claims came from players who played that specific role during the game, supporting Williams' identification theory (1986). Game players' reports of identification met the 75% criterion for game Objective 1.

Table 1

Response by 75 North American Christians to Question 9 "Check any character with whom you could identify."

		#, % of Characters Claimed in Identification					
		Father	Mother	Daughter	Son	G.mother	Priest
Character	N						
Father	10	9 90%			1 10%		
Mother	23	1 4.3%	12 52.2%	3 13%	3 13%	2 8.7%	2 8.7%
Daughter	13	3 18.8%	2 12.5%	8 50.0%	2 12.5%	1 6.3%	
Son	14	2 28.6%	1 14.3%	1 14.3%	3 42.9%		
Gr.Mother	12		2 10.5%	3 15.8%	4 21.1%	8 42.1%	2 10.5%
Priest	3						3 100.%
Total	78						

Tables 2 and 3 show analysis of data in assessing how well Objective 2 for the game was met: "to increase sympathetic understanding about Soviet believers who experience dilemmas in the practice of their faith".

Two of the self-report questions on the Evaluation Form (Appendix B) provide data in assessing affective as well as cognitive reactions after playing the game. Question 5 asks about the usefulness of the simulation experience in learning new information with 76% of the players reporting a rating of "5" or above on a 7-point scale. Only 60% of players report such high ratings on Question 6 about the game's usefulness in attitude change, falling short of the 75% criterion.

However, when the raw data from the Decision Predictor are examined, all but four players reported **some** change in their predicted behavioral response to at least one of the six dilemmas presented during the game. For purposes of this study, there is no right or wrong answer, and a change in **either** direction can be counted as a sign of some shift in attitude after play. Table 2 shows such shifts for 20 players at Test Site #15. Table 3 then summarizes data from all five test sites.

Table 2

Site #15. Extent of each player's change on six dilemmas

Player	Amount of change per question						Total change per player, either way
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	
1	2	3	0	0	2	2	9
2	2	2	1	1	1	3	10
3	1	4	2	2	0	3	12
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
7	2	1	3	3	4	0	13
8	2	2	0	0	0	2	6
9	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
10	1	2	0	2	0	0	5
11	1	1	0	0	3	0	5
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
13	2	4	3	0	3	0	12
14	0	1	2	1	2	0	6
15	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
16	1	2	3	0	3	3	12
17	0	1	1	0	4	2	8
18	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
19	2	2	4	4	4	4	20
20	1	1	2	3	1	3	11
20	22	30	26	22	32	27	159

Average shift per player for all six dilemmas = 7.95

Table 3

Average change for all players using Decision Predictor

Category	Field Tests, 5 N. A. Christian groups					
	#14	#15	#16	#17	#18	Total
Question #1	25	22	12	17	16	92
Question #2	15	30	7	22	20	94
Question #3	23	26	13	23	18	103
Question #4	22	22	22	24	12	102
Question #5	43	32	27	17	4	123
Question #6	15	27	10	7	6	65
Total spaces shifted	143	159	91	110	76	579
Total # of players	17	20	12	15	8	72
Average change	8.41	7.95	7.50	7.33	9.5	8.04

The extent of shift on post-game questionnaires of intended behavioral response shows an average change on this [+3 to -3] empathy scale that varies from 7.33 spaces for Test Site 17 to 9.5 spaces shift for Site 18. So far then, summative evaluation suggests that the game provides greater cognitive information than attitudinal shifts on players' self reports. However, responses of intended behavior in either direction on empathy scales show changes in players' ratings and support for the game's objective of greater sympathetic understanding for Soviet believers and the dilemmas which they face.

The third objective of the game is "to create a setting in which the influence of the group can be brought to bear upon decision making." This objective is measured by Questions 7 and 8 on the Evalution Form. Only one third of the players report that the influence on them from other players was "stronger than average". On the second question, only 28% of the players report "greater than average" success in influencing others' decisions during the game. As presently used the game does not meet the predicted criterion level for influence from the group discussion context.

Summary

Use of the Decision Predictor and Evaluation Form proved useful in formative evaluation of the simulation game, DISCRETION VS. VALOR, through eight 1987 revisions These measures also proved valuable during 1988 field tests by 75 North American Christians playing the revised DISCRETION VS. VALOR in five different settings. Data were gathered about how well the simulation game met its objectives and how well the criterion-referenced research hypotheses were supported. Results support Williams' "identification" theory and suggest further study. Use of a empathy scale provided data on behavioral intention to supplement players' self-reports of affective changes.

References

Bailey, E. and Tarasar, C. (1987). Eyes to See, Ears to Hear. New York: Friendship Press.

Livingston, Samuel, Fennessey, Gail M., Coleman, James S. Edwards, Keith, and Kidder, Steven. (1973) The Hopkins Games Program: Final Report on Seven Years of Research #155. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University.

Williams, Robert, McCandless, Peter, Hobb, Dennis, and Williams, Sharon A. (1986). Changing Attitudes with "identification theory. Simulation and Games, 17 (1), 25-43.

REVISED APPENDIX A

DISCRETION VS. VALOUR: A Simulation by Barbara Blackstone

DECISION PREDICTOR _____Before playing the game; _____After playing

Pretend that you have to make each of these decisions in the USSR.
Circle the one that best decribes what you would do in this situation.

Definitely Yes +3	Probably Yes +2	Maybe Yes +1	Maybe Not -1	Probably Not -2	Definitely Not -3

1. If I had a Bible and access to some study guides, I would invite other Baptists to my home to read/study the Bible together. +3+2+1-1-2-3

2. If I had some musical ability, I would give practice in learning hymns to my son and two of his Baptist friends in our home. +3+2+1-1-2-3

3. If I were a 17-year-old in need of Soviet university education, I'd give up open worship & try to be a good Komsomol member. +3+2+1-1-2-3

4. If I were an 11-year-old with athletic aspirations, I'd join the Young Pioneers even it meant that I couldn't wear my cross. +3+2+1-1-2-3

5. As a grandmother on a pension in Moscow, I'd probably write letters to the newspapers if I felt human rights were being violated. +3+2+1-1-2-3

6. If my Orthodox priest friend were in prison for his outspokenness, I would visit him and attempt to smuggle in a Bible to him. +3+2+1-1-2-3

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Circle the role you played: father-mother-daughter-son-grandmother-priest

REVISED-APPENDIX B

GAME EVALUATION FORM for DISCRETION Vs. VALOR:

Please circle one number and return to Barbara Blackstone. Date:____

1. How much did you enjoy playing the game?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very little Very much

2. How easy was it to follow the instructions and rules of the game?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very difficult Very easy

3. How comfortable were you with the length of time that it took to play?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very uncomfortable Very comfortable

4. IF you were uncomfortable, was it too short?____ or too long?____

5. How helpful to you was this experience in learning new information about Soviet believers?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
No help received Very helpful

6. To what extent did this experience cause you to change your opinions about Soviet believers?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
No change A great deal

7. To what extent did other individuals help YOU make wiser decisions during the rounds of play?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
No influence Strong influence

8. How successful did you feel that you were in influencing other family members' decisions during the discussion before each round?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
No influence Very successful

9. Check any character with whom you felt you could identify (see yourself somewhat similar to them):

father?__ mother?__ son?__ daughter?__ priest?__ grandmother?__

Then circle the character that you played during the game.

10. What changes would you recommend in the game that would improve your understanding of Soviet Christians? (Use the back of this sheet.)

END

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